



Martha's Vineyard Land Bank Commission

APR 10 2015

to: all town advisory board members
from: James Lengyel, executive director
date: April 6, 2015
subject: goats

You will remember from last June's all-island budget meeting, plus the individual town advisory board meetings that followed, that the commission believes that the land bank should make a serious effort to determine if goats can be an effective management tool for the institution.

A significant amount of the total land bank acreage is grassland and there are multiple sound reasons — ecological and scenic prominent among them — to retain these areas as grasslands. This is a dynamic habitat, however; unless conscientiously mowed, especially in the growing season, grasslands tend to succumb to brush and trees.

But mowing is not always the right tool. Some grasslands host box turtles and these turtles would not survive mechanical mowing. In addition, many land bank properties undulate and some slopes are too steep for a tractor to be used safely.

As a result, the land bank commission voted a few months ago to solicit bids for a "goat-scaping" service. Rebecca Brown, as Island Grazing, submitted the sole bid that met the land bank's goals. She would, for \$30,000 per year for three years, run some 100 goats on land bank properties. The objective sought was to defeat the woody vegetation and change the soil chemistry so that grassland species would have the upper hand and thus require less intensive management in the long term.

Commissioners voted at that time to place \$30,000 in the draft budget for the fiscal year beginning on July 1, 2015. Recently, however, this plan was upended when Ms. Brown decided to take a job in Maine. After some conversations between her and the land bank staff she agreed to sell to the land bank, for \$24,260, all of her livestock and equipment. This includes 70 adults and 35 kids plus trailers, fencing, fence energizers, veterinary

supplies and the like.

Matthew Dix believes that the land bank staff is capable of managing this herd and accomplishing what Ms. Brown otherwise would have accomplished — and at an overall lower cost. Summer employees are available to handle the growing season but the challenge lies in the off-season — the land bank would need to overwinter the animals and assure that they are properly bred so that fresh blood is constantly entering the herd. By a fortuitous coincidence, the land bank is now positioned to do so: last June the land bank bought a property that includes both a caretaker's cottage and a pasture. The seller was George Fisher and the land bank has since leased his former house to caretakers Laine and Julie Scott. They live there rent-free, in exchange for performing 19 hours of work per week on the Wapatequa Woods Reservation and its abutting land bank preserves. As it happens, they are experienced livestock handlers and can attend to all of the goats' overwintering needs.

The land bank commissioners have voted to accept Ms. Brown's \$24,260 price and to purchase her goats and equipment. There was some real timeliness in this decision, since Ms. Brown is *en route* to Maine. Proceeding in the current budget cycle means that the land bank will need to draw funds from underexpended line items, shifting that money to the goats.

In the draft budget for the cycle beginning on July 1, which the town advisory boards will review in June, there will appear expenses for a winter shelter and feed, plus ancillary costs.

Commissioners stipulated, in their vote to purchase the animals, that this would all take place on a one-year trial basis. Should it prove burdensome or infeasible, the land bank would liquidate the investment by selling everything — the livestock and the equipment.

Please telephone me with any questions you may have.

copy: *Martha's Vineyard land bank commission*